

DEPARTMENT OF STATE


ASSISTANT SECRETARY

June 16, 1964

The Honorable
John McCone,
Director,
Central Intelligence Agency.



Mr. Manning wanted you to receive a
copy of the attached memorandum to the
President concerning the information
program on the U.S. involvement in
Southeast Asia.


W. Marshall Wright
Special Assistant
Bureau of Public Affairs

State Department review completed

June 16, 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY

The attached memorandum to the President outlines some assumptions on some proposals concerning the information program for Southeast Asia. It is not intended to be complete and is subject to the widest alterations and additions. Since time is short, however, I am taking the liberty of forwarding it to the White House with the expectation that some of its most obvious proposals can be got under way immediately and other aspects can be discussed at an early meeting.

Robert Manning

Attachment:

As stated.

(EXECUTIVE SECRETARY FILE)

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June 16, 1964

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Information Program for Southeast Asia

The problem of a U.S. information program supporting our involvement in Southeast Asia falls into three major categories -- (1) the on-the-scene information program for consumption in South and North Viet-Nam, Laos and other Southeast Asian countries; (2) the case to be made in the international arena; and (3) a different matter, the case to be made to our own people and Congress.

The Senate's decision to place Barry Zorthian of UNIA in overall charge of the program on the scene puts that part of the job in good hands and makes it more likely that we can get useful results from the ideas and directives that emanate from Washington. The official given overall responsibility in Washington should, therefore, concentrate on the other two categories, the international and the domestic, with higher priority given to the domestic.

Some thoughts on the dimensions of the domestic problem and some ways of approaching it:

Basic Assumption: If the U.S. policy in Southeast Asia and the necessary courses of action are thoroughly and effectively explained to the American people, they will support that policy.

The Situation: Until recently we have benefited from a relatively limited American interest in the Southeast Asian situation even though we have suffered more than 1,000 casualties (130 dead) and are pouring treasure and prestige into Southeast Asia at an increasing rate.

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Both because of developments in the area and the potential of the situation as a campaign issue, we are now threatened with a rapid and serious deterioration of public and Congressional support. This deterioration is not certain, but likely. We can take little comfort from the recent Gallup Poll that showed 63 percent of the U.S. public not interested in the Viet-Nam situation. The 37 percent who are interested are, for the most part, opposed to our conduct of the Vietnamese situation either because they think the United States should not be there (the least vocal but, I would guess, the larger part of the opposition) or because, harboring the old frustrations of the Korean war and the across-the-yalu-syndrome, they want us to strike at the north. The percentage of non-interest is probably already melting, and as the campaign develops there could be serious slippage in American support for the government's program in Southeast Asia.

It seems clear that the major political opposition and the major public opposition to our Southeast Asia involvement cut in different directions. It is hardly conceivable that the GOP could campaign for a "soft policy" and it is not credible to me that the general public will ever demand (without government leadership) that the war be extended. This division within the opposition can work to our advantage if we succeed in forcing public comment into precise and clear discussions of alternatives. If, however, the public discussion continues to be loose and diffused, it will be possible for opponents simply to decry present policies, and time to rally behind themselves all the opposition, both dove and hawk.

Purpose: To encourage and organize a domestic program based on truth and credibility and designed to increase public knowledge of the nature of the United States involvement in Southeast Asia, its importance to the national interest and its demand for the patience and sacrifice that go with world leadership.

Note: We cannot embark upon this program without lessening the flexibility of the U.S. Government in dealing with the Southeast Asia situation. Specifically, to the extent that we succeed in convincing the public of the necessity for our

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present policy, we may reduce public and Congressional receptivity to any so-called political solution reached through premature negotiation with the Communists. This program is therefore based on the assumption that the U.S. Government intends to stick to its commitment to stay in Southeast Asia and to give South Viet-Nam all it needs to defeat Communist aggression.

Prospects: In a word, the possible achievements of an information program are limited. The memories of Korea, the bitter French experience in Indochina, the ugliness and brutality of the war in Viet-Nam, mixed with the odor of confusion and frustration that seeps out of Saigon, are poor material on which to build understanding and confidence. Too many available answers are unfavorable answers. Obviously what we need are some victories, at least a dramatic turn or two in our favor. Such do not seem greatly in prospect for the next few months, a period during which campaign heat and oratory are likely to make Viet-Nam a much more troublesome issue for the President and his Administration. The resignation of Ambassador Lodge adds new problems of a type not yet discernible.

Lacking victories, there are steps we can take that can improve understanding and rebut the "easy answer" critics, but there are few measures presently at hand that will make Americans feel happy or confident about the situation as it is now going. We have already lost important elements of the press, for example, the New York Times and Walter Lippmann. The situation is looked on with skepticism and/or suspicion by the rest of the news media. We are confronted by the persistent undermining tactics of President deGaulle.

We must make the effort -- but we should realize that the results, at best, will be limited and that only success will make the Viet-Nam war "popular."

Summary: The program must be based upon the assumption that public acceptance of the U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia will be forthcoming if the reasons for that involvement are adequately explained. The major deficiency in the present situation is

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Prognosis: In a word, the possible achievements of an information program are limited. The memories of Korea, the bitter French experience in Southeast Asia, the ugliness and brutality of the war in Viet-Nam, mixed with the odor of confusion and frustration that seeps out of Saigon, are poor material on which to build understanding and confidence. Too many available answers are unattractive answers. Obviously what we need are some victories, at least a dramatic turn or two in our favor. Such do not seem greatly in prospect for the next few months, a period during which campaign heat and oratory are likely to make Viet-Nam a much more troublesome issue for the President and his Administration. The resignation of Ambassador Lodge adds new problems of a type not yet discernible.

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public confusion about our purposes and a poisonous suspicion on the part of the public that they are not being told the truth either about the nature of U.S. activities in Southeast Asia or the prospects for success. Credibility is the essential key to the success of a broad program to shore up and sustain public support for the Administration's Southeast Asia policies. There will be times when we must choose to look bad but be believed rather than strain to look good and closely expend suspicion, dislike and resentment.

The program itself must consist of two parts; one dealing with the communications media, the other more directly with the public;

A. The media -- both at home and in Viet-Nam every effort must be bent to producing within the media support for our policies where possible, understanding and objectivity where support is not possible. Basically, this can be done only by providing more complete and more credible information to the correspondents. We have long since passed the point where the media will accept in Southeast Asia a daffy-knows-best-acceptance-on-faith attitude.

A basic problem is the lack of a "scorecard." The conflict in Southeast Asia is and will remain dirty and diffused and extremely difficult to assess concretely in terms of success and failure, progress and deterioration. There is no battle line to show gradually moving forward in maps in the newspapers. There are no broad strategic thrusts which the press can convey regularly to an understanding public (such as subsunk, convoys safely arrived at port, enemy airplanes downed, or a number of strategic bombing flights.)

We must provide a scorecard. It must not be a phony scorecard; and it must be simple enough and factual enough to be usable by the media and understandable and convincing to the half-informed public. One possibility is to take one of the critical provinces upon which we are now beginning to concentrate our efforts. It should be a genuinely critical province but one in which our chances of success are reasonable. We should

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direct media (and thus public) attention to this province and then concentrate both American and Vietnamese resources as necessary to bring about a clear-cut and considerable improvement. By doing this we will provide at least in some measure the essential in any good information program: success.

There are doubtless other ways in which we can provide a scorecard and these should be actively developed on a priority basis. We must be careful, however to avoid the temptation of contrivances designed primarily to make us look good. The end result of dissimulation can only be the destruction of our credibility.

3. Direct contact with the public -- It is of equal importance that we make every effort to go beyond the media (with whom our success will at best be limited) directly to the public. This effort will serve a double purpose: First, it will create public understanding and support; second, it will raise the level of public comment on Viet-Nam and force hostile media into a more factual and objective treatment of events and alternatives there. In short, it will tend to focus the debate on to the alternatives. The higher the level of public debate, the more favorable is the battlefield for presentation of the reasons underlining our policy.

Our program should consist but not be limited to the following specifics:

Media

1. provide a scorecard.
2. an enhanced program of providing detailed factual information to correspondents both in Washington and Viet-Nam. This must include policy as well as information officers and it must include high level as well as operational officers.
3. The injection into TV interview shows of American military and civilian reticence from Viet-Nam. We should concentrate on the local interview shows at least as much as the

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national. With rare exceptions these shows present the guest at his most sympathetic. This will serve both to humanize our involvement in Viet-Nam and to lead the viewers to identify themselves with it. A particularly eloquent or notable returnee from the battle area might be given a two- or three-minute exposure on a major entertainment show, such as Ed Sullivan's. (The summer lay-off hinders us here.)

4. We should begin to give publicity to Americans who have performed feats of gallantry and heroism in Viet-Nam. Public knowledge of our involvement is now total and yet the only news the public gets is of our casualties, accompanied by background music denying that our involvement is in any way central. All the world loves a hero and I am sure we have some in Viet-Nam. It is high time we begin to give the American public something to be proud of rather than merely something to be sorry about.

5. We should arrange (assumedly through A.D. which obviously has the channel) to get Steve Canyon or Terry and the Pirates or both into Viet-Nam. In their own way these strips are highly educational and they are ideally suited to dramatize the conspiratorial and savage nature of the Communist assault on Viet-Nam and why and how the U.S. is trying to combat it.

6. A few people in the media will play a central role in setting the tone of media comment on Viet-Nam. Some of these (Walter Lippmann, for example) are committed to such an extent that there is little opportunity left to influence their views. Most, however, are skeptical but still flexible. We should identify the 10 or 15 most influential such individuals and arrange for personal conversations on a continuing basis between them and appropriate policy officers of the U.S. government. The purpose of these contacts would be:

a. To expose these key media men to the best government thinking on Viet-Nam. This will remove the possibility that their hostility is due to a lack of accurate information.

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b. To ensure balanced reporting by these media men.

Direct contact with the public

1. An invigorated program of public speeches by high U.S. officials with particular attention being paid to geographic dispersal throughout the country.
2. Preparation of speech texts for leading supporters in Congress, to counteract -- here and in Viet-Nam -- the harmful effects of speeches by such men as Wayne Morse.
3. Maximum use of all levels of civilian and military personnel returned from Viet-Nam on home leave or new assignment for public speeches at service clubs and other local organizations with particular emphasis on hometown and home-area exposure.
4. The development and widespread use of a special question-and-answer pamphlet and a variety of other information (now in preparation) designed to show what we are doing, why it is necessary to our own national security, to rebut the doubt about Vietnamese willingness and ability to fight, and to expose the fallacies of alternative policies (withdrawal, neutralization, escalation, etc.) These information papers will have to be of a quality far superior to the normal government information handouts. To be effective they will have to be characterized by blunt honesty, a high degree of candor, and a style more reflective of a personal moral and intellectual commitment than of institutional detachment.
5. The government is getting a great deal of mail from the public on Viet-Nam and Southeast Asia. Some of it is captions, and most of it is questioning. This gives us an excellent opportunity to get directly to a most deeply concerned part of the public. I suggest that we crank up an effort to provide a personal response to every letter. Short, detailed answers should be provided to all questions and allegations, and in addition the reply should be personal in its tone. It

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should reflect the personal interest, whole-hearted commitment, and deep dedication to our involvement in Southeast Asia that is felt by the ranking officers of our government. Each letter should be signed by an official dealing directly with Southeast Asia, as high-ranking as possible. Preparing the individual, personalized replies will take a lot of additional resources. I urge that they be provided, since I am convinced that over a period of months no single activity could have a greater activity than this, if it is properly done. Every outgoing letter on Southeast Asia should be as good and as strong and as personal that, were it printed in a letters-to-the-editor column (as they often are) or read aloud on a television program, it would ring out with genuine conviction and feeling.

6. Increasing contact with church leaders and the leadership of selected non-governmental organizations to generate support on the grounds of:

a. the moral requirement to help Southeast Asia resist Communist aggression, and

b. the importance of Southeast Asia to U.S. national security.

The State Department is staffed to implement the institutional contacts with civic groups, world affairs councils, and many other national bodies. The Defense Department could concentrate on veterans organizations and similar groups with a special felt interest in security requirements. It would probably be a good idea if highest level officials -- perhaps the President personally -- could appeal privately to the U.S. Catholic hierarchy, Billy Graham, and to other church-group heads for understanding and support for the Vietnamese war.

7. We should arrange for a professional polling service to sample U.S. public involvement therein. This should be a continuing service designed to identify the major causes of public discontent and its location, geographically, socially, and politically. This service will cost only a small amount, probably less than \$5,000 and it should be arranged promptly

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

2. A National Security Action Memorandum from the President (draft attached) outlining the project, designating the coordinator, and authorizing the coordinator to draw on all government agencies for manpower and material resources as required.

Enclosures:

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